

Hymenia recurvalis (Fab.) and other Lepidoptera at Swanage, October 1976

By P. M. STIRLING*

Swanage, Dorset, has provided many interesting lepidoptera in the autumn during previous years, and accordingly on the 8th October, 1976, with my wife and Jim Porter, we visited the well-known Durlston Head locality.

As this area is now part of the local National Park, we obtained permission from the warden to use light traps and placed these overlooking the steep cliffs. We also set up a Heath trap beneath some Holm Oaks by the car park.

The early part of the evening was fairly mild and produced a few of the more general autumn moths such as *Rhizedra lutosa* (Hüb.), *Omphaloscelis lunosa* (Haw.), *Allophyes oxyacanthae* (Linn.), *Noctua pronuba* (Linn.), *N. comes* (Hüb.) and *Agrochola lychnidis* (D. & S.), whilst the more interesting species were represented by *Leucochlaena oditis* (Hüb.), *Aporophyla australis* (Bois.), *N. nigra* (Haw.), *Mythimna l-album* (Linn.) and *Dasypolia templi* (Thunb.). We also noted a single specimen of *Lithophane leautieri* (Bois.). A fair amount of the ivy was in bloom and from this we took three *L. socia* (Hufn.), although surprisingly we were not able to record *Xylena vetusta* (Hüb.) from this blossom; a species which in my experience can readily be found at this locality during early October.

Quite late in the evening Jim Porter examined his Heath trap, and from the few moths it contained removed a rather striking brown and white marked pyrale. This he willingly gave to me not having any interest in the microlepidoptera himself. Another pyrale recorded at light and well known for its migratory habits was *Nomophila noctuella* (D. & S.). Of the larger migrant species we noted *Peridroma saucia* (Hüb.), *Agrotis ipsilon* (Hufn.) and *Autographa gamma* (Linn.).

It soon proved difficult to determine the brown and white pyrale, and it was eventually taken to the British Museum (N.H.) where it was recognised as *Hymenia recurvalis* (Fab.). This species is a rare migrant not only to the British Isles but to most of Europe, and in its more tropical haunts is a serious pest of root and cereal crops where it is known as the Beet Webworm, and can apparently complete its entire life cycle in four weeks. It has a more usual distribution in the Palaearctic region from Syria to Japan and the Oriental, Australasian and Ethiopian regions; it is also recorded from North, Central and South America and the West Indies. Recent studies, however, indicate that similar specimens are not all applicable to just the one species and that *recurvalis* is not such a cosmopolitan species as has previously been supposed.

Robin Mere was the first person to take the moth in England when he found a specimen in his garden light trap

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on 5.ix.1951, and another was recorded later that year at Swanage. Since then several more examples have been noted from the south of England.

This specimen is in the British Museum (N.H.).

My thanks are due to Mr. Michael Shaffer of the Natural History Museum for determination of the species, and Jim Porter for parting with the moth in the first place.

References

- Lees, F. H. 1952. *Ent. Rec.*, 64: 70.
 Mere, R. M. 1952. *Ent. Gaz.*, 3: 57.
 Martin, E. 1961. *Coridon*: 2.
 Ellerton, J. 1970. *Proc. Brit. Ent. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 3 (2): 33.

Current Literature

Rhopalocera Directory, by **John R. Beattie**. Insecta Directory volume 1, [ii] + xiv + 365 pp., 1976. Published by J.B. Indexes, Berkeley, California. Paper covers, computer produced offset reproduction. \$30.00 (\$40.00 to libraries).

For anyone who has ever thumbed through endless volumes of the *Zoological Record* just in case it did ever pick up a second reference to *Sinarista*, or any other equally obscure butterfly name, the *Rhopalocera Directory* is a god-send. The *Directory* is based on the *Archiv für Naturgeschichte* 1834-7, the *Bericht über die wissenschaftlichen Leistungen im Gebiete der Entomologie* 1838-63, and the Systematic Index of the *Zoological Record* 1864-1971. The first 64 pages indicate the location of all generic name citations in the butterfly sections of these works, and pages 65-292 do the same for all trivial name citations. Pages 293-300 lists the allocation of generic names to family (as treated at various times in the *Bericht* and *Zoo. Rec.*), and pages 301-365 comprise a clever "inverse sort" of names, intended to help trace misspellings. The efficient thinking behind the project, and how to use the *Directory*, are briefly but clearly outlined in the 14-page introductory section.

Even though it is a "tertiary" source (as its author is at pains to point out), access to the *Directory* is a must for any butterfly specialist. It makes use of the *Zoological Record*, especially for rarely quoted species of genera, immeasurably quicker and more reliable—though I doubt it would ever become "fun" as Beattie suggests!

This is an extraordinary useful work, sensibly produced, and in general difficult to praise too highly. One of my few criticisms is that the opportunity has been lost to fully index W. F. Kirby's pioneering *Synonymic Catalogue of Diurnal Lepidoptera* (1871 and 1877) at the same time—this would have given some coverage to practically all butterfly names back to 1758. But the *Rhopalocera Directory* will rightly take its place alongside "Kirby", "Seitz", "Lep. Cat.", "Hemming", etc., as one of the first reference sources for any serious systematic treatment of butterflies. Entomologists in general should look forward to the publication of subsequent volumes covering other groups of the Insecta. — R. I. VANE-WRIGHT.